

# OPEN LETTERS.

## SOME RECENT PAPERS ON NOMENCLATURE.

*To the Editors of the Botanical Gazette:*—Although the Rochester rules have given American botanists some tangible guide in nomenclature, and the recommendations of the Harvard Memorandum have provided the believers in letting bad enough alone with some means of mitigating the chaotic conditions to which they have become accustomed, it does not seem advisable to cease all agitation upon the subject of nomenclature. It may be true that the time so spent would be better spent in other lines. But if the enormous waste of time which will eventually be entailed by the establishment of four or five distinct nomenclatures in as many botanical centers may be obviated by a slight expenditure of time now, surely such use of it will not be entirely vain.

My only purpose in this note is to call attention to some recent publications of that indefatigable and zealous reformer, Dr. Otto Kuntze, who is endeavoring to secure a competent international congress and through such a congress an international nomenclature. The botanical world, as Dr. Kuntze points out, now has at least four more or less distinct systems of nomenclature. Each is gaining currency in the regions under its peculiar influence, and each, he asserts, is obstinately maintained by its promoters, who in consequence are unwilling to take any active interest in securing an international code. The world has the basis of such a code in the Parisian laws, which are to a greater or less extent at the foundation of each of the present systems. But the interpretation and application of the Paris code is a matter of general disagreement, and its insufficiency in its present form is unquestioned.

In 1895 Dr. Kuntze published an article entitled "*Les Besoins de la Nomenclature botanique*" in which, after pointing out the danger to nomenclature arising from the existence of local codes or systems at Berlin, at Kew, and in America, he puts forward nine propositions for a congress to be held at Paris in 1900. Dr. Kuntze's idea of what such a congress should be deserves more attention than it has received. He does not believe in a gathering of men fresh from other studies which, without having given the matter more than passing attention, shall proceed to settle all disputed points at once. To anyone who has had experience with the numberless unexpected and complicated problems which a settlement of the subject must dispose of, if it is to be a settlement at all, it is apparent that a great deal of preliminary work must be done in the way of testing the application of various rules suggested so that those who are to decide upon them may do so intelligently, and in ascertaining just what are the defects to be remedied and what are the dis-

urbing elements in our present nomenclature so that the settlement may reach all of them. Dr. Kuntze believes that this work can hardly be done in a thorough manner between now and 1900.

In a circular to the Société Botanique de France, published in March of the present year, Dr. Kuntze reiterates the importance of preparation for the projected congress. He says: "It (the congress) cannot honestly inscribe in its order of the day the revision of the Parisian code without a necessary international preparation lasting three years at least." When it is remembered that Dr. Kuntze's scheme of such a congress involves the putting out of a "Nomenclator Plantarum omnium," it will be seen that the importance of preparation is not exaggerated. Dr. Kuntze possesses qualifications both of experience and otherwise that point him out for the compiler of such a nomenclator. It would be a great pity to throw away the opportunity of securing his services in constructing one upon the lines of an international code. He will doubtless go on with his work of preparing it in any case.

In the *Oesterreichische Botanische Zeitschrift* for May of this year, in the *Journal de Botanique* of May 16, in the *Bulletin de l'Herbier Boissier* for July, and the *Journal of Botany* of the same month, are articles by Dr. Kuntze, in each of which he urges the necessity of a congress and points out the danger of the present state of things. It seems proper to call attention to these articles if only because of the sincerity and admirable zeal of their author.

The repeated protests of Dr. Kuntze against the establishment of four or five distinct nomenclatures in as many places are not to be treated lightly. One great object of nomenclature is to secure international currency for plant names. If we are not to have this, we may as well throw Latin nomenclature over and use the vernacular. The condition of things in which "sage brush" gets into European works as "Salvia" is not greatly bettered by one in which four or five nomenclators will have to be used and cross references made in order to be sure what a given binomial refers to. I have followed and shall continue to follow the Rochester rules because I see no other rules available for American botanists, and because I prefer rules to caprice as a guide, whether I entirely agree with the rules or not. But if American botanists are to be content with legislation for their own needs and are to remain indifferent to or even to hinder international action, will Dr. Kuntze's taunt that we are anarchists be wholly unwarranted?

In Mr. Erwin F. Smith's "Protest" against the check-list, he says: "What we need is the speedy convening of a representative international botanical congress, which shall amend the Paris code . . . and shall settle once for all certain disputed interpretations of this code." Those of us who have been unwilling to abide in anarchy till such a congress is convened should not be less active in urging competent international action than our more conservative brothers.—ROSCOE POUND, *Lincoln, Nebraska*.